

## ***FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** October 10, 2013

**Agenda Item:** North Shore WMA Land Acquisition/CE

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

### **Background**

FWP proposes to purchase approximately 189 acres of farmland and wetlands located along the north shore of Flathead Lake about 4.5 miles east of Somers. Funding for the project would be provided by the Bonneville Power Administration through FWP's fisheries mitigation program to help offset impacts associated with the construction of Hungry Horse Dam. The landowner has agreed to sell this land to FWP for \$1.6 million, which is below the appraised market value of \$1.73 million. BPA would retain a perpetual conservation easement on the property. The purposes of the proposed land acquisition are to protect ground water, surface water, and wetlands on or near Flathead Lake for benefits of aquatic life and fish and wildlife habitat. Other benefits include ability to restore riparian/wetland and upland habitats, maintain annual crop production to benefit resident and migratory waterfowl, and provide opportunities for seasonal and compatible public recreation. Fisheries and Wildlife divisions support long-term property management under the Wildlife Program consistent with the jointly-developed management plan. This acquisition adjoins FWP's 160-acre North Shore State Park/WMA and the 2,362-acre federal Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

FWP worked with numerous agency, tribes, and community organizations within the Flathead River to Lake Initiative in developing this project for two years prior to the decision to move forward. FWP issued its draft EA for a 31-day public review Aug. 1. FWP held an open house/public hearing on Aug. 20 and notified the public about the project and hearing through legal ads, press releases, emails/letters to all adjoining landowners and other interested publics. Project articles appeared in both local and regional newspapers and stories were aired on two local/regional radio stations. FWP received 36 emails or letters supporting the proposed project because it would benefit Flathead Lake north shore, water quality, wetlands, wildlife, and public recreation. Two people attending the open house/public hearing in Somers and the editors of the Daily Interlake voiced strong support for the project. FWP did not receive any opposition. FWP responded to two questions in the decision notice.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

FWP considered the no-action alternative in the draft EA. Under no-action, the landowner would ultimately sell this property. The landowner was not interested in conservation easement-only alternative. If sold to a private entity, the property would likely be developed or subdivided impacting landscape continuity and other project benefits. Through this environmental review process, FWP did not find any significant negative impacts associated with proceeding with the proposed action.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

Because of the importance of conserving this landscape, the high level of public support for the project, and the availability of BPA funding, FWP recommends that the Commission approve the project as proposed in the draft EA and decision notice.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move that the Commission approve the North Shore WMA land acquisition as well as the deed of conservation easement held by BPA as described in FWP's decision notice of Sept. 6, 2013.